How Will We Live Together: Executive Summary

September 2018

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Committee structure

The work of this self-study was completed collaboratively by a Steering Committee (SC) of students, staff and faculty. SC members were intentionally selected to ensure a diverse spectrum of experiences, positions, perspectives and identities. The SC designed and executed all data collection efforts, with generous support from other colleagues as needed. The work of the SC was supported by an Advisory Committee (AC) of additional students, faculty and staff, also selected intentionally for their diverse positions, backgrounds, identities and experiences. The primary task of the AC was to offer ongoing feedback and advice on both process and content. The two-committee structure will be maintained through the external review phase of this project. A list of members for both the SC and AC are available at go/livetogether

Data collection

A mixed methods approach was utilized. Data was collected from five primary constituent groups:

1. Students residing in the Commons (but not serving as residential life (ResLife) staff); collection methods: Randomized sample survey (N = 440), numerous focus groups (examples include Posse scholars, Febs, varsity athletes, etc.)

2. Staff working within the Commons (both professional and student); collection methods: Student ResLife staff survey (N = 35) and 2 focus groups, professional Commons team group interviews (one each with Coordinators, CRDs, Heads, and Deans), Individual interviews and electronic correspondence with Commons team members as desired. For full job descriptions of all Commons staff (both professional and student) see appendices B and C

3. Colleagues (faculty and staff) with direct curricular or programmatic connections to the Commons; collection methods: Connected offices survey (N = 20, of which approximately 50% were faculty), Meeting with the Center for Teaching Learning and Research (CTLR) faculty / staff (N = 7), two open faculty sessions (N = 2)

4. Other interested campus community members; collection methods: Many direct emails received, informal conversations

5. Colleagues at other colleges and universities; collection methods: Survey (N = 29) with follow-up phone interviews

In addition, we collected documentary evidence, financial data, and reviewed previous relevant studies and reports, including:

- Extensive budgetary and organizational structure data
- Comparison data obtained from a consortium of similar schools of which Middlebury is a member
- The 1998 Enhanced Residential Plan

- External consultant Jim Terhune's Social Life on Campus: Student Satisfaction and Social Culture (the "Terhune Report")
- Draft report of the May 2018 Campus Space Utilization Study
- Walking tour of residential infrastructure for committee

Data analysis

Critical interview data was member checked to enhance validity. All qualitative data was chunked and sorted to reveal important themes, which were then compared to findings from other relevant Middlebury reports to search for consistency or related data points. The randomized student survey data was entered into SPSS and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The draft report was reviewed by the advisory and steering committee members for feedback and revised accordingly prior to submission to Vice President of Student Affairs (VPSA) Taylor.

Organizational Structure

The Commons system is supported by 5 individual Commons teams that include a Faculty Head, Commons Dean, Coordinator, and, a CRD. Each Commons also has a group of wonderful student staff. 70+ students are in our ResLife team across all five Commons.

The Commons Deans and Heads occupy ostensibly equal positions in the organizational hierarchy but have separate reporting lines. The Deans, and through them, the rest of the Commons teams report up through the Senior Associate Dean of Students, who reports to the VPSA. The Commons Heads report to the Dean of the Faculty. The Heads have no formal staff supervisory role within their Commons. These dual reporting lines demand excellent communication, collaboration, and role definition to be effective. However, the various Heads and Deans have significantly different working styles, relationships, expectations, and levels of collaboration in the operations of the Commons. In some Commons, these factors have resulted in role ambiguity and confusion among these critical Commons leaders.

There is a notable absence of shared understanding among the Deans on the specific roles and responsibilities of the CRDs and Coordinators across Commons. Little consistency of practice or expectations was evident in these supervisory relationships. The hiring process and supervisory structure of the student residential life (ResLife) staff similarly lacks clarity. The CRD, Dean, and Coordinator job descriptions all contain redundant language pertaining to student staff supervision. In some, but not all Commons, the Heads too have traditionally played an informal role in supervising the student ResLife staff. The CRDs understand themselves to hold primary responsibility for all of these functions.

Decentralized and centralized elements of student affairs

The present student affairs and residence life structure has evolved in a largely ad hoc fashion. There does not appear to have been any recent and thorough assessment of which student affairs functions are appropriately decentralized and which are better consolidated. As a result, tensions exist between the functions performed by the decentralized Commons offices, those that remain centralized in the Dean of Students office, and those that straddle the line between the two. This tension has given rise to a host of problems, including a lack of consistency of practice across Commons, mission creep, confusion among campus stakeholders about the functions of the Commons offices, and capacity issues for both

the Deans and CRDs. On balance, the general trend however appears to be towards greater centralization, though this has not been formally articulated by Senior Leaders.

Capacity limits

A clear issue of system capacity limits was present during this review. Illustrating this point, one Dean's available time for student meetings was described as having been reduced by 40% in the last 18 months. In the 17/18 academic year, Outlook calendar analysis reveals it was typical for Deans to spend 18-20 hours / week in non-student meetings and committee work. CRDs report spending half of their time in standing meetings and committee work, leaving little or no time for programming in the residence halls.

Information flow

A largely decentralized student affairs model in which some key functions reside with the Commons, and others with the Dean of Students office, requires a carefully designed system of information flow to work effectively. At present, no system exists to ensure information shared with, or produced within, the Commons is integrated and made accessible (consistent with appropriate and consistent privacy policies and applicable laws) to all who might need it. A climate of distrust exists between the Commons and the centralized DOS office which adds to challenges with the sharing and general flow of information. All of these issues must be addressed if a partially decentralized student affairs system like the Commons is to reach full potential.

The challenge with accessing student records provides a useful illustration of the issues around information flow which currently exist. Collaboration across Commons and between the Commons and central DOS office (essential for fairness, equity, consistency, and risk management) relies on effective sharing of student records. These records are currently stored in a variety of locations (the Advocate conduct management system, paper files within each Commons office, the Star Rez Housing system, Banner, and so on) which are either poorly integrated, or not integrated at all. Staff members scattered across both the decentralized Commons teams and within the Dean of Students office have varying degrees of access to the information in these systems. Due both to these structural issues and inconsistent administrative procedures across Commons, even staff members holding nominally identical positions in different Commons (for example Coordinators, who serve as critical first points of contact and perform frequent student triage) have significantly different levels of access to information essential to their job functions.

Decision making

The Commons system would be strengthened and made more efficient by role and authority clarification around decision making. A lack of clarity around who within the organizational structure holds decision-making authority, and in which circumstances was noted. Internally in most individual Commons, there is a strong ethos and tradition of collaborative and consensus driven decision-making about everything from student staff hiring to conduct outcomes. While consensus decision making can be effective in some circumstances, it has at times been applied too broadly and ineffectually within the Commons, and has sometimes become synonymous with no one holding the final authority and responsibility for decisions. This has in some cases led to inefficient, unnecessarily time-consuming decision-making, occasional decision paralysis, and role confusion (particularly around the purview of the newest team members, the CRDs).

There is a pervasive sense within the Commons that the professional staff are often excluded from critical decisions (for example, the shifting of conduct cases from the Deans to the CRDs) which directly impact them, and that such decisions are frequently imposed upon them with little if any warning. "Owners" of key decisions should be explicitly identified to stakeholders, and where possible and appropriate, Fair Process decision making (a strategy aimed at gaining stakeholder buy-in and embedded in the Restorative Practices framework) employed. In instances where decisions are already made, or particular outcomes are necessary or foregone conclusions, this too should be explicitly communicated in as respectful a manner as possible, and the rationales for such decisions clearly articulated to stakeholders whenever possible.

Consistency

Unsurprisingly in a model defined by deliberate decentralization, but not supported by robust and intentional information sharing or a strong supervisory culture (see below), consistency of practice across the five Commons is uneven. This challenge is widely recognized within the Commons teams and is currently being addressed. It is critical to understanding the present system however that these issues be documented.

Staff training, expectations and supervision

Considerable variation exists in staff training, expectations, and supervisory practices. While some minor variation is reasonable, the present levels of inconsistency are sufficient to cause confusion and frustration among staff. For example, the expectations and resulting workload for student ResLife staff vary substantially across Commons despite identical job descriptions, initial training, and compensation levels. Professional staff on boarding, training and expectations likewise vary significantly. Too often insufficient time has been set aside for regular, structured and intentional mentoring, information exchange, goal and priority setting, etc., between supervisors and supervisees. This has been true throughout the Commons reporting structure. Another manifestation of inconsistency is the roles the various Heads play in their Commons. Levels of involvement, areas of emphasis, and relationships between Commons Heads and the rest of the core Commons teams vary widely.

Administrative processes

The College has a need and responsibility to ensure basic fairness, equity, and consistency of administrative processes. This it true in terms of student support, risk management, and operational efficiency. At present, this critical responsibility is not being uniformly met. Examples include differences across Commons in the processing of students returning from withdrawal, in the way similar mental health circumstances are managed across the Commons as noted by Parton Counseling Center colleagues, standards applied in the issuing of Deans' excuses, and so on. This is a critical issue and should be addressed promptly through the standardization and documentation of all key administrative processes.

Position team functionality

With the exception of the Commons Deans who do meet as a team regularly, there is presently no practice or clearly articulated expectation that the position teams (for example, all five Coordinators, CRDs, or Heads) meet regularly to exchange information, discuss challenges, check for consistency of practice or supervisor expectations, etc.

Commons Councils

The student Commons Councils in their present iteration are envisioned as key programming bodies, tasked with producing both regular social programming within their Commons, and with at least a single large campus community-wide event annually. Unfortunately, as the Terhune report states, “there is near universal agreement that Commons councils are not functioning well or serving their communities effectively.” At present, there is no cross- Commons consistency in who sits on these councils, who advises them, how they are structured and make decisions, how they manage their funding, and so on. This is reflected in the varying levels of effectiveness reported among the five councils, with some delivering large campus events in the last year, and others doing little if any programming. Recognizing these issues, the Student Government Association Finance Committee (SGAFC) recently cut the annual Councils financial allocation in half, while leaving open the possibility of additional funding if improvement and quality programming is forthcoming. Significant reform, applied consistently across all five Commons, is needed.

Campus Climate & Community

There is a strong desire for inclusive residential communities from all members of the Middlebury College community. Everyone we spoke with in one way or another described a wish to have residential communities where all students can find opportunities to belong, develop friendships and participate as fully as they would like in the social opportunities at the College. Despite the strong desire from stakeholders across the campus for a vibrant and welcoming community much work needs to be done to realize this goal. Of concern is the variations in students’ experience of climate and community, particularly among minority students who describe challenges to feeling that they are valued by and belong at Middlebury.

Climate / community data

The College participates in a biannual survey of student social life satisfaction among peer institutions. Findings from the past few waves of data collection indicate a negative trajectory for student social life satisfaction. Middlebury students are increasingly less satisfied with their social experiences. They also report considerably lower levels of social satisfaction compared with many of our peer institutions.

Students in our focus groups offered a wide range of descriptions of the climate and their experiences of community at the College. For many students, Middlebury is a place where they have a deep well of support, strong friendships, fulfilling extracurricular engagements and a strong sense of belonging, but this is by no means a universally held perspective. On more than one occasion racial/ethnic minority students said that, knowing what they now know about the Middlebury community, they would have chosen to attend another college. The theme of not belonging at Middlebury was strongly expressed among racial / ethnic minority students and students who described their family socioeconomic statuses as low.

The Feb students we met in the focus groups described an experience of feeling isolated from, and poorly integrated with, September admits and older peers. There was a perception among Febs that they were viewed as less academically prepared or otherwise deficient by the Admissions office. Many of the Febs believe these negative appraisals led to their offer to join the College during the off-cycle Feb period. Febs also described challenges meeting people when they entered, due in part to being

housed most commonly among Juniors. The Feb experience is examined in greater detail later in this report.

Middlebury is a participating institution in the longitudinal Student Mental Health Pathways Study. In the most recent data collection (January 2018) it was noted students' satisfaction with social experiences, interpersonal levels of acceptance, rejection, and overall satisfaction with their college experience differed significantly based on students' race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, first generation status, and varsity athletics participation. Students from racial/ethnic minority groups, lower and middle socioeconomic status backgrounds, sexual minorities, first generation, and non-varsity athletes reported significantly lower levels of social satisfaction, acceptance, college belonging, overall college satisfaction, and higher levels of rejection compared with white, heterosexual, upper socioeconomic, non-first generation, and varsity affiliated students.

Inclusion in the College community

As the data discussed above indicates, we are falling short in creating a campus that leads to inclusion for all of our students. The decentralized nature of the Commons system may in some ways unintentionally limit movement towards full inclusion, as their largely autonomous natures make coordinated cross- Commons programming difficult and further divides students. Diversity and inclusion through the Commons lens is examined in more detail below.

Physical space and the College community

Spaces have profound effects on the experiences that occur within them. The College owns a wide variety of student housing (traditional residence halls, houses, townhouses, social houses, affinity and language housing). There is an inventory of approximately 67 buildings where students live. These housing resources are spread out over a relatively large campus. We have toured through a significant number of the different types of housing and note significant disparities in student housing. In particular, spaces for socializing, both informal ones such as residence hall lounges, and reservable spaces for events of all sizes, are extremely limited and in some cases and buildings, nonexistent. Put simply, there needs to be adequate spaces available for communities to form. The loneliness and isolation many students report is consistent with the availability and organization of spaces we provide students. Particularly among upper class students who are able to live outside of their Commons, there is no clear identification with a particular Common's community—the space for that community simply does not exists. This lack of Commons identity among older students was starkly apparent in the data, with few if any reporting any real sense of affinity with their Commons.

All of these findings strongly suggest that the number, size, location and character of spaces within the Commons for social activities and other programming are inadequate and need improvement. It seems likely in fact that the space challenges outlined above are inhibiting the Commons teams in the accomplishing of their community building work.

Small communities within larger community

Staff involved in the Commons describe vibrant communities where students feel a sense of home. The students we spoke with by and large did not share that sentiment. In fact, one element of the Commons, the "4:2" residency requirement (discussed in greater detail later), may be exacerbating the challenges students experience forming communities, particularly in their second year. Sophomores and some second semester first year students discussed the challenge of having to live with students from

their same Commons. Many felt that this requirement was arbitrary, and for some students, limited their ability to form meaningful communities of their own.

Dining halls

In virtually every point of data collection with students, dining halls were described as the place students go to meet with their friends, and where socialization occurs the most. The Terhune report also notes students' use of dining halls as a primary space for socialization. The multiple dining halls also appear to contribute to increased student segregation. It was reported in our focus groups that locations for particular meals are associated with particular groups of students. For example, we heard how students of color tend to eat lunch in one dining hall, while other groups of students may eat in another. We could not independently confirm this troubling anecdote, however the perception of segregated spaces in the dining halls was pervasive.

Finally, we heard from students that the decentralized dining hall system added to the experience of not seeing a friend for extended periods of time. Students described attending a campus event, meeting a new student, and then not seeing that person for weeks. This scenario is easy to understand in light of the size of the campus, the geographic dispersal of the residence halls, and the lack of a single shared student space. Without one centralized space for student socialization, the possibility for development of social networks through familiarity, proximity, and chance encounters is diminished.

Commons based community development

Commons Deans, CRDs, Heads and student ResLife staff are all charged to some degree with developing community. The balance of community development work therefore appears to fall largely on the student ResLife staff. The First Year Counselors (FYCs) we spoke with however described significant challenges generating student interest in events. FYCs spoke of purchasing food, fresh fruits, donuts, etc., and sending an email to their hall inviting students to stop by the FYC's room for snacks. These events were described as only occasionally successful, with only 2- 3 students attending. The students on the other hand describe Commons events as unnatural and feeling forced. Considerably more enthusiasm was expressed for dances and other large events where students from across all Commons could attend and interact.

Communities around the dinner table

One of the hallmarks of the Commons system is the Commons dinners. The Commons Heads spoke passionately about a sense of community that develops when sharing a meal in a home. First year seminars (FYS) typically share a meal with their Professor at a Commons Head's house. Many students, when asked about the Commons, mentioned the meal with their FYS as a primary touch point with the Commons Heads and reported enjoying the experience. For many students however, this was the only time they reported attending an event at one of the Commons Head's houses. Faculty also frequently mentioned the FYS dinners, with the vast majority who did so describing them as positive experiences for their students. There were mixed perspectives about the necessity of having these dinners within a Commons Head's house. Some faculty reported they appreciated having the dinners but didn't think the dinners needed to be at the home of a Commons Head. Other faculty described Commons Heads who either appeared disinterested in the dinners or were more active in leading the discussion than the faculty would have liked. There was no clear consensus from faculty about their desires for the role of the Commons Heads during the FYS dinners. Regardless, students appreciate the opportunity to meet informally and share a meal with faculty.

Case Management / Pastoral Care and Mental Health

Stakeholders across campus contact the Commons Deans and Coordinators with concerns about students, and these staff then facilitate connections to resources and support. Faculty, the CTLR, Parton Health Center, other Dean of Students colleagues, student residential life staffs, other students and families all exchange important student information with the Commons teams. This information hub model is atypical among peer institutions and offers significant benefits when well executed. Despite the information flow limitations described earlier, nowhere is the value of this model more evident than in case management and pastoral care (defined as personalized and holistic support for students in need, spanning the physical/mental health, social, and academic domains) in which the Commons often appear highly effective.

Mental health burdens, particularly depression and anxiety, have become increasingly well- recognized challenges for college students in recent years. Recent research has indicated a "mental health crisis" occurring on college campuses. Throughout the review process it is was clear that Middlebury is not immune to the increased demand to support student mental health needs. Data from the Parton Center for Health and Wellness indicates 307 students (~55%) from the graduating class of 2018 sought counseling services at some point in their four years at the College. Approximately 25% of the student body seeks counseling services within an academic year, leading to 3,445 individual counseling sessions per academic year.

A strong focus on adequately addressing the mental health needs of students pervades the present Commons system and at times seems to overwhelm other functions. The Commons offers multiple touch points (CRDs, Commons Coordinators, Common Deans, Commons Heads, student ResLife staff) for students in need of mental health support. While the Commons teams do not and should not function as clinicians, and instead aim to connect students to the counseling center, they provide invaluable triage, referral and initial crisis response services. In addition to connecting students with services and support, Commons Deans are the primary point of contact for people across campus, as well as family members, who are concerned about the mental health of a particular student. Deans facilitate appropriate exceptions and extensions with professors as well as time management and tutoring support from the CTLR. Faculty note that they appreciate having a point of contact to whom they can relay information, yet wish that the Commons Deans would be more proactive in keeping them informed of student outcomes. The faculty we gathered data from appeared to be unaware of the scope and severity of the mental health challenges Commons Deans are addressing. The enormous scope, scale and severity of student mental health challenges may be a contributing factor in what many on campus (faculty in particular) note with concern as inconsistencies among the Deans, particularly in how student needs are managed. Currently there is no uniform system for keeping track of their work with students. Some Deans reported keeping notes in a paper notebook, others of filing cabinets maintained by the Coordinators, and others used calendar entries and emails to record interactions with students over the years. The lack of an organized searchable system for student contact within the Commons is concerning. The time and resources devoted towards student mental health and case management by the Commons teams are significant. Anecdotally, it appears the Commons may frequently be effective in this realm. However, we had no way to evaluate the effectiveness of these efforts with precision due to the lack of information, assessment and evaluation of processes. Considering the scale of resources being utilized, more information is needed to better assess, tailor and effect positive change for students.

Inclusion and diversity through the Commons lens

Middlebury has benefited immensely from the arrival of increasingly diverse classes of entering students. Simultaneously, we have experienced profound moments of reckoning with questions about what kind of community we want at Middlebury and how we want to live together. We frequently heard concern from respondents representing student, faculty and staff perspectives, about the extent to which the climate is not as welcoming as it should be for an increasingly diverse student body. We heard from Commons staff who described working with minority students who find Middlebury a particularly difficult place to acclimate. Similar concerns were raised with regard to socioeconomic diversity, with students from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds reporting greater challenges adjusting to the College.

Creating a more welcoming and inclusive Middlebury requires a residential and student affairs system that is both proactive in its work towards full inclusion, and highly attuned and responsive to the ever-changing dynamics of the campus community. Here, the Commons appears to be playing a constructive role, but also has considerable room for growth. The data from the Student Residential Life Survey indicates racial/ethnic minority students may appreciate the benefits of the Commons more than their non-racial ethnic minority peers. Specifically, racial/ethnic minorities reported small, yet statistically significant, higher rates of endorsement to statements indicating they receive support from the Commons (e.g., the Commons helps me academically; helps with my relationships with faculty; provides me with valuable resources, etc.). We were encouraged to see that the Commons may have a positive effect on students who feel the least connected to the College.

A strong desire to create a more inclusive Middlebury was evident throughout the residential life and Commons system. We are convinced the people that comprise the Commons are genuinely committed to this work. Yet we are unaware of any systematic efforts, sustained programs or initiatives that specifically seek to create a more inclusive residential experience. The decentralized structure of the Commons, the significant focus on case management and pastoral care and the enormous time and energy it consumes, and the limited coordination across Commons seem to be impediments to initiating College wide inclusivity practices within the residential system.

Academic Integration

Among the main purposes of the Commons as envisioned in the 1998 Enhanced Residential Plan was "...to improve the intellectual atmosphere of residential life at the College." The Enhanced Residential Plan also framed as one of its cornerstones that the Commons be "...devoted to integrating educational activity and mature community living." The Commons Heads (referred to as Affiliates in the Enhanced Residential Plan) were envisioned as essential in realizing these aspirations. While it is clear that there are significant academic and intellectual elements woven in to the fabric of the Commons today, it does not appear accurate to characterize academic and intellectual exchange as in any way a central feature of the present- day Commons.

Role of Heads

The Terhune Report states that, "Students convey that they like both the concept of the faculty Heads' role, and the people who serve in it." Feedback about the Commons Head position in our data was more mixed, however. We noted a perception among students that Heads are active in orientation and early in the first year, but much less so afterwards. First year seminar dinners for example, traditionally

hosted by the Heads, are appreciated by students, but by definition only reach first years. It was not uncommon to encounter students who were unaware of who their Heads were. A lack of consistency in the roles Heads play from Commons to Commons was apparent. The Heads report rarely if ever being in the same room together as a group. Such absence of regular communication virtually ensures inconsistent practices from Commons to Commons.

Academic role of Deans

Commons Deans are responsible for monitoring the academic progress and status of students throughout their four years. They work closely with faculty in supporting students with academic challenges and manage late adds / drops, extensions, and Dean's excuses. Deans facilitate the student withdrawal, leave, and return processes. While faculty reported appreciation for this work, they also expressed concern over perceived variation in the ways in which Dean's excuses, extensions and the like were managed from Commons to Commons.

First Year Seminars

There appears to be broad consensus that First Year Seminar assignments tied to residence create important opportunities for students to engage around seminar topics outside of the classroom, and that such engagement is welcome and productive. In addition, due to the often scattered nature of Feb housing, Febs do not enjoy this benefit as fully as September admits.

Academic support

The Center for Teaching Learning and Research (CTLR) provides a strong level of academic support for students, and works closely with Commons Deans to identify and connect with students in need. They appreciate and value this collaborative relationship. The CTLR teams expressed a desire that more training be provided for ResLife staff to assist with pre-advising as one area for improvement.

Faculty affiliates

All faculty at the College have at least a nominal affiliation with a particular Commons. As one junior faculty member described however, they were told of their Commons affiliation when they arrived at the College, but then never again heard anything about it. Faculty respondents largely describe their experience with the Commons as either contacting a Commons Dean about a student concern or attending the occasional dinner at a Commons Heads house. No coherent plan to more fully integrate faculty in to the life of the Commons exists at present, thought the Commons Heads expressed enthusiasm for exploring possibilities in this area.

Developmental framework

We are working with our students during a developmentally critical time, as they are in the process of transitioning from late adolescence into emerging adulthood. It is during this period that much of the solidifying of identities occurs. The multiple identities of race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, and ability are still forming. What happens during their Middlebury years will help guide students onto a host of trajectories. This is particularly true with regard to identity development, which is a deeply referential process. The relationships we have, the way in which we move through spaces, the environments we call home, all change how we see ourselves, how we see others and our expectations for relationships more broadly. We hope we are helping students move towards healthy

and fulfilling lives. It is with this in mind that we sought to find evidence of goals, programs, assessments and further refinement of student development outcomes.

We found no system wide or even Commons-specific student development goals. Rather, it seems we offer a hybrid between a barracks/dormitory model of residential life and a high level of social services/pastoral care monitoring and intervention.

Only 19% of student survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Commons "offer social, educational, or cultural programming I like to go to," and only 19% agreed or strongly agreed that they "take advantage of Commons events." One critically important qualification to these findings is that students identifying as racial and ethnic minorities agreed or strongly agreed with these statements at statistically significant higher rates than their majority identity peers.

Social and emotional development

It is an open question whether our chronically overscheduled students would be receptive to and have time to devote to developmentally focused programming. Many campus constituencies however (CTLR, Heads, Deans, Coordinators) report their impressions that our students are increasingly lost, needy, socially challenged, etc. Perhaps most distressing, recent data suggest that our students experience little or no social and emotional skill development in their time at Middlebury. This therefore appears to be an area for careful additional scrutiny.

Existing developmental programming

It is important to note that there are a number of existing initiatives that could form the foundation for a compelling residential curriculum grounded in student development theory including:

- Restorative Practices (RP) which is being introduced in our campus-wide community building framework, and will be launched in the 2018/19 academic year
- Midd View, our weeklong orientation program
- The Commons offices, which serve as important centers of knowledge of campus resources and policies, referral agents, and "triage" student needs on an ongoing basis, and are located in first year communities
- The First Year Seminar program draws connections between the residential and intellectual lives of new students, offers an excellent introduction to the academic expectations of the College, and provides students with their initial academic advisors.

Sophomores

In the last decade, various efforts to support and engage sophomores have been made both within and outside of the Commons. Little has taken hold and persisted however. The Center for Careers and Internships (CCI) has a history of sophomore focused programming, with their Sophomore Conferences intended to help sophomores "...explore with alumni and faculty how to connect your liberal arts learning to life's possibilities." CCI also offers a year-long series of events and opportunities that targetsophomores and the decision and reference points they encounter throughout the year.

Finally, a collaborative program between the Commons and CCI known as the Sophomore Experience was piloted in 08/09 and focused on helping students connect their personal, academic and intellectual

interests with possible career paths through Commons based conversations with faculty, and workshops delivered by CCI staff in the Commons. Among the goals for Sophomore Experience was to offer students an additional rationale for remaining in their Commons with the advent of the 4:2 residential requirement (4 years Commons affiliation and 2 years of required residence within a particular Commons). The 4:2 model is generally well regarded by the Heads and Commons staff. Many students however report ambivalence and contend that forcing in-Commons housing in the sophomore year is too restrictive and limits them socially. Only 25% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "Picking a sophomore year roommate from my same Commons is a good idea," while 37% disagreed or disagreed strongly, and 38% neither agreed nor disagreed. This sentiment was consistent with the Terhune Report, which sums up the issue in the following manner:

"The 2-year residency requirement may be the most vexing issue related to the Commons. On the plus side, it helps foster close communities and enables students to carry forward friendships formed during the first year in ways that mitigate some

of the common challenges faced by sophomores on other campuses. Conversely, though, many students feel it is limiting, and creates obstacles to connecting with peers outside the Commons. This is especially challenging for students who don't make close connections in their first-year residential communities."

As will be seen below the impact of a 2-year residency requirement can be particularly problematic for Febs.

Juniors / Seniors

Intentionally designed programming for Juniors and Seniors within the Commons is minimal to non-existent. Students are divided about the 4-year Commons affiliation requirement, with 25% of students surveyed holding a favorable view of 4-year Commons affiliation, 29% an unfavorable one, and 40% neutral. As a practical matter, the Terhune Report found that "With few exceptions direct involvement in the Commons all but ends for most students after the sophomore year." The scaling back of support for these older students is widely regarded as developmentally appropriate among Commons staff and Heads, though they do point to two exceptions: A widely held recognition that students returning from study abroad programs (typically juniors) often need support, and an openness to creative collaborations with other departments and offices to support older students.

Febs

The Feb experience in establishing their places in the campus community is widely viewed among Febs as problematic. Integrating with September admits is perceived as a troubling and persistent challenge. While not universal among Febs, it is clear that this struggle is experienced with sufficient regularity to demand attention.

When Febs enter the College, the most readily available housing is often in junior communities recently vacated by older students departing to study abroad. As a result, Febs often live disconnected from their September admit peers and one another. The recent advent of the Feb YC position has been a welcome change, but with Feb YC often supporting a group of Febs scattered across floors and buildings, Feb YCs face significant challenges in mirroring a first year floor community experience. The ResLife staff actually living on the floors with Febs are often RAs, and frustration with them was prevalent in our focus group. Repeated variations on the theme that the "RAs don't know me / do anything / care / program" were expressed.

Febs also frequently report that they feel there is little incentive for the older students among whom they live to connect with them socially, and that the Commons create few opportunities for them to mingle with Febs from other Commons, fall admits, or older students. The cumulative result of these challenges is frequent feelings of isolation and disconnectedness. For many Febs it appears this disconnection persists through their sophomore year, due largely to the 2-year in-Commons residency requirement that forces them to remain housed in a Commons with which they feel little affinity. These findings are consistently supported in the data collected for this self-study, in feedback received from Feb Orientation leaders (generally Febs themselves) and in the Terhune report. From an academic perspective, Febs noted with concern that their Feb Seminars are not Commons-based as the First Year Seminars are, and this was viewed by some as a missed opportunity to connect with other Febs within their Commons but housed in different buildings and floors. Febs reported very little interaction with or support from their Commons heads.

Financial considerations

It is undeniable that the Commons is an expensive and staff intensive model for residential life. The larger questions are therefore about the value proposition the Commons represents. Do the benefits we enjoy from it represent sufficient return on our investment to justify the expense? In a time of constrained financial resources, what residential life model can the College sustainably afford? The answers to these questions must be informed both by this self-study and the findings of the October external review, and so are best addressed in detail in the final report due in early 2019. For now, we have endeavored to develop an accurate and inclusive picture of the true costs of the present system. Where comparison data with other institutions is available, we have considered it.

Budget data

The total cost of the Commons, including staff and student staff compensation, programming and administrative budgets, and course releases for the Commons Heads, on an annual basis (based on FY18 figures) is approximately $1.79 million. This figure does not include the costs associated with maintaining the five Commons houses occupied by the Commons Heads. In broad terms, the cost of the Commons breaks down as follows:

- Professional staff compensation (salary and benefits): $1.26 million
- Student ResLife compensation: $230,000
- Student staff training: $44,000
- Programming Budgets: $127,000
- Admin Budgets: $96,000
- First Year Seminar budget: $11,000
- Student Activities Fee funding: $20,000

Total Commons Budget FY18: $1,788,000

FTE count and comparison data

Middlebury is member of a consortium (not to be confused with the 3-school consortium recently created between Middlebury, Champlain and St. Michael's) of similar schools through which comparison financial data is available. Direct comparisons to this consortium must be viewed with caution due to differences in the ways in which varying organizational structures influence who is and is not counted as residential life staff. Nonetheless, it is clear that Middlebury is high on two metrics relative to the consortium reference group. Including the housing office, there are presently 17 12-month, benefits eligible FTEs within the Commons and Residential Life. This is the highest among the consortium comparison group and 170% of the median. Our FTE student / professional residential staff ratio of 193 is 200% of the median ratio from other schools in the consortium.

Opportunity costs

Several opportunity costs, while difficult to quantify with precision, are important to consider. First, the Heads receive course releases for their service in the Commons, effectively removing them from, or reducing, their time in the classroom. The cost of these releases may vary significantly from year to year, and from one cohort of Heads to another, based on whether or not their departments need to replace their teaching capacity in a given discipline or semester. The Dean of the Faculty suggests $30,000 as a reasonable cost estimate for a typical year and cohort. It is possible that in other years or with atypical cohorts of Heads, there could be no course release costs, or that they could exceed $30,000. Regardless, during their service as Commons Heads, senior tenured faculty are not in our classrooms with the frequency they otherwise would be. The second source of opportunity costs are the Commons houses. While this report in no way advocates these options, the College could elect to repurpose them for other uses, including student housing or programmable social spaces, both of which are in short supply. These opportunities not taken must be considered in calculating the true cost of the Commons.